

THE ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER  
FOR A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HUNGER

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A Professional Project  
Presented to  
The Faculty of  
The School of Theology at Claremont

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

The Eucharist, the most ancient, universal and fundamental of the Church's traditions, implies a Christian ethos which impells the Church to fight the unjust causes of hunger. This project articulates that ethos through a study of the ethical presuppositions of the Judaic, Hellenistic and Christian cultures toward the Lord's Supper in the first three centuries. Through a study of I Corinthians 11: 17-34 it identifies the Pauline methodology for the creation of a sacramental theological ethic. Finally the implications of this sacramental ethos are drawn for the modern Church in its struggle to relate to the global condition of hunger.

The section devoted to the Hellenistic presuppositions for the sacrament focuses upon the meal's legal significance as an oath and act of commitment in memory of Christ. The section on the Judaic presuppositions reviews the ethical significance of all Jewish meals and focuses upon the particular covenantal implications of the Passover meal. The material for the early Christian presuppositions is drawn from the word field describing the character of the early Church itself. Attention is given to the earliest-known forms of the sacrament, which reveal the importance of its ethical nature.

Paul's theology is systematically analysed for its ethical implications, which are then used in a brief exegesis of I Cor. 11: 17-34 in which Paul chastises the Corinthians for their improper celebration of the Lord's Supper. The conclusion drawn from this is that Paul viewed a church divided by social classes based upon wealth and power as a desecration of the Body of Christ.

The significance of all of this is finally clarified by relating it to the problem of how and why the Church should relate to the problem of hunger. The theological-ethical definition of the nature of Christian response is based upon three characteristics of Christian life: agape, justice and hope.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Why should the Church respond to the condition of hunger? Almost two-thirds of the human race are suffering from severe hunger and malnutrition.<sup>1</sup> In recent years an unprecedented number in the hundreds of thousands of people have died of starvation and related causes.<sup>2</sup> The biosphere is threatened by poor farming methods and extravagant levels of consumption by the wealthy few.<sup>3</sup> Many look to the Church, whose resources of hope, energy, vision and wealth are desperately needed, for relief of the suffering caused by hunger. A great deal of work must be done if the Church is to confront, with all of its power, the entrenched forces behind the complex causes of hunger. If the Church is not clear about why it is involved in this effort and what it is that marks its response "Christian," then the Body of Christ will not be able to express more than a parochial interest in the issue. Painful and controversial decisions and steps must be made if the Church is to deal with the problem seriously, so it is essential that the people of God articulate their unique purpose and theological and ethical resources for the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul and Arthur Simon, The Politics of World Hunger (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1973), p. 27f.

<sup>2</sup>Lester R. Brown with Erik P. Eckholm, By Bread Alone (New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 27f.

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Ward and René Dubos, Only One Earth (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 191f.

task. Otherwise the Church's response will be weak and will lack the unity and force of direction that will be needed.

The Boston Industrial Mission, headed by Norman Faramelli, has articulated the need to

probe the theological and ethical roots of our tradition, and to test out on the regional and congregational level how that tradition is applicable today. A critical ethical sensitivity is needed on the personal, social and systemic levels. Theological thinking, Bible study, ethical reflection provide a way to develop a rationale for our involvement. And a theological/ ethical rationale for involvement is imperative.<sup>4</sup>

### THESIS

The Eucharist, the most ancient, universal and fundamental of the Church's traditions, implies a Christian ethos which impells the Church to fight the unjust causes of hunger.

### SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to articulate some of the components in the Christian ethos which require the Church to respond to the unjust conditions producing hunger in the world. The ethical pre-suppositions toward the Lord's Supper of the Hellenistic, Judaic and Christian cultures of the first three centuries A.D. will be identified in chapter two. In chapter three St. Paul's theological ethic of the sacrament will be considered as a component in a Christian ethos for justice toward the poor and hungry. The fourth chapter will summarize the preceeding two and apply the ethos to the contemporary situation.

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<sup>4</sup>Boston Industrial Mission, "The Church and World/ Domestic Hunger: The Next Steps" (Boston; 1976), p. 11f.

Most of the literature on the Lord's Supper focuses on two concerns: its theological implications for an individualistic, pietistic faith and the qualities of the liturgy which suggest a basis for ecumenical unity. Though this project will examine the theological implications of the Sacrament, that theological reflection will focus on the Liturgy's implications for mission, rather than for piety. Likewise, the fact that many in the church hope to use the service of Communion to unite believers from diverse perspectives of the Christian tradition in a common liturgical event and self-understanding, is significant for a full church response to hunger. This project will focus, however, on a prerequisite of such unity, the articulation of the Christian ethos that requires it. A third body of literature concerning the Last Supper is that devoted to the scholarly study of its Biblical-historical roots. Much of it points to a common pre-understanding: a Christian ethos of responsibility toward the poor.

In summary, then, this project will approach the task of articulating a Christian ethos from a perspective of the Eucharist for involvement by the Church in the struggle against the forces of hunger. It will identify the cultural and religious presuppositions in the event making use of the fruits of recent literary-critical Biblical analysis. It will lay the theological foundation for a hunger ethic. It will apply this ethic to the problem of hunger as it now confronts the Church, thereby suggesting a definition of the nature of Christian responsibility for the establishment of justice in the modern context of a global community enslaved by injustice whose symptom is hunger.



## DEFINITIONS

Hunger means the condition of humanity characterized by the debilitating effects of malnutrition and starvation which result when the need to eat and drink is not adequately met. The word will refer generally to the unjust conditions in food-producing and distributing systems which do not provide human beings with the food that they need.

The Lord's Supper will be used interchangeably with the Eucharist, the Sacrament, Communion, the Last Supper and the Liturgy. By these terms I mean the remembrance of Jesus Christ which is celebrated by the Church in the sharing of the cup and the breaking of the bread.

The Church means the whole body of believers who acknowledge their identity by participating in the Lord's Supper.

The Poor are those who suffer from hunger.

Pietism is that aspect of faith primarily concerned with its meaning for personal salvation.

Mission is that aspect of faith primarily concerned with its meaning for the salvation of the universe.

Salvation means the fulfillment of the will of God, ie. the establishment of peace, justice and wholeness in the created order.

Sacrament refers to an action or event which, when repeated by the Church, reveals God's presence and blessing.

Ethos is an unspoken social ethic, a standard of action which is presupposed within a given culture.

Hunger Ethic is a norm of conduct for response to the injustice that results in hunger.

Agape means love that is shared and that demands justice.

## WORK PREVIOUSLY DONE

Very little has been written about the ethical implications of the Lord's Supper. Even less has been written about the Sacrament's implications for the Church's fight against hunger. This seems strange when one considers the analogy between Jesus feeding His disciples<sup>5</sup> and the Church feeding the world. It would seem natural to focus on the Eucharist's implications for mission, yet most of the material centers on its pietistic implications.

In the area of the cultural and religious presuppositions of the event, William Barclay's book, The Lord's Supper,<sup>6</sup> provides an excellent summary, especially his final chapter entitled "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper Today." Joachim Jeremias' work, the Eucharistic Words of Jesus,<sup>7</sup> is recognised by many as a classic in its field. It makes a strong case for the idea that the Lord's Supper is a re-interpretation of the Jewish Passover meal. In so doing Jeremias provides an excellent perspective of the Jewish culture and tradition. Johannes Behm in his article entitled "Esthio" in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament<sup>8</sup> provides valuable material on the role of eating and drinking

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<sup>5</sup>cf. Mark 14: 22-26 and par.; The absence of material is even stranger when one considers the symbolic similarity between the Lord's Supper and the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6: 32-44 and par.); cf. Vincent Taylor, The Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 321.

<sup>6</sup>William Barclay, The Lord's Supper (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967).

<sup>7</sup>Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

<sup>8</sup>Johannes Behm, "Esthio" in Gerhard Kittel (ed.), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), II, 689.

in both the New Testament and in the traditions external but relevant to it (primarily the Old Testament). None of these address the problem of hunger in 1976 specifically.

The most significant work in regard to Paul's theological ethic of the sacrament is Hans von Soden's "Sacrament and Ethics in Paul."<sup>9</sup> It lays the theoretical foundation for identification of the sacramental ethic. Hans Conzelmann's I Corinthians<sup>10</sup> is the most comprehensive and up-to-date commentary on the letter in which the theological ethic is used. Ernst Käsemann in "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper"<sup>11</sup> and C.K. Barrett in The First Epistle to the Corinthians<sup>12</sup> provide important insights to Paul's concept of the Last Supper. The work of A.J.B. Higgins in The Lord's Supper in the New Testament<sup>13</sup> is helpful in pointing out ethical implications in Paul's theology. Similar stands are taken by Arthur Cochrane<sup>14</sup> and Arthur Vogel<sup>15</sup> in suggesting that a non-sacramental understanding is necessary if the act is to have meaning for those confronting hunger in a modern world.

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<sup>9</sup>Hans von Soden, "Sacrament and Ethics in Paul," in Wayne Meeks (ed.) The Writings of St. Paul (New York: Norton, 1972).

<sup>10</sup>Hans Conzelmann, I Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

<sup>11</sup>Ernst Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper" in his Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1960).

<sup>12</sup>C.K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

<sup>13</sup>A.J.B. Higgins, The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Chicago: Regnery, 1952).

<sup>14</sup>Arthur Cochrane, Eating and Drinking with Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

<sup>15</sup>Arthur A. Vogel, Is the Last Supper Finished? (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968).

## Chapter II

### ETHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."<sup>1</sup>

These are the words of institution of the sacrament of the Eucharist recorded in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. They were written at least one-half century after Jesus was crucified.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to identify the source of and formative influences on these words and the liturgical tradition they represent, many scholars have researched the social customs, liturgical forms and religious concepts of three dominant cultures of the first three centuries: Hellenism, Judaism and primitive Christianity. Few scholars, however, have focused on the specific problem of the impact that these cultural influences may have had on the ethical presuppositions of those who practiced the rite. Virtually no English-speaking scholars have given primary attention to the implications of the celebration of communion for a response by the church to conditions of hunger and poverty. When such implica-

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<sup>1</sup>I Cor. 11: 23b-25; all scriptures are quoted from the Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

<sup>2</sup>Joachim Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 188f; Jeremias says that though the Pauline account is the the oldest literary form available today, the Markan account shows the influence of a pre-liturgical historical oral tradition from the first decade A.D.

tions are noted in historical studies of the literature, they are footnoted as secondary forms of the liturgy.<sup>3</sup> Whether they are secondary or not, they are important for the Church's self-understanding as it struggles with the increasing global phenomena of hunger and severe poverty. They must not be ignored.

#### HELLENISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

No doubt there were Hellenistic influences on both the presuppositions and perhaps even the form of the Eucharistic tradition during the first three centuries A.D. The Apostle Paul was a well-educated citizen of imperial Rome, whose political, military and cultural power dominated most of the known world during Paul's time. The churches that Paul founded were undoubtedly influenced by Hellenism. This influence is seen most clearly in the language used in the sacrament.

The term "sacrament" itself comes from the Latin term, sacramentum,<sup>4</sup> which was originally a legal term denoting the property (sheep or oxen in its earliest use) which was entrusted to the court by each party when one person brought suit against another.<sup>5</sup> The winner of the suit was allowed to reclaim his property, while that of the loser was remanded by the court to the temple for "religious purposes." It is not clear from this whether the beasts were sacrificed at the temple or not. If they were and when regular sacrifices were made, the priests

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<sup>3</sup>Hans Lietzmann, Mass and the Lord's Supper (Leiden: Brill, 1953-), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup>William Barclay, The Lord's Supper (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 7ff; The scholars are still debating the origin of the term "sacramentum." Most define it in terms of mysterion. See below, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

would burn only a small part of the animal (a few hairs for example), and received a portion of the meat for their own food. The remainder was prepared by its former owner for a "sacramental meal" shared among his friends and served in the temple where the god to whom it had been sacrificed was acknowledged as host.<sup>6</sup>

Sacramentum, then, in its earliest uses meant the symbol, the proclamation, of one's pledge. It was a commitment of one's wealth to the cause of justice. Later sacramentum became the term which identified an oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor which was taken annually by his soldiers.<sup>7</sup> This oath became so popular that "the provincials (were) eager to take it too, as a proof of their loyalty."<sup>8</sup>

Eventually the symbolic nature of sacramentum became equated with the mysterium of the mystery cults, which communicated sacred secrets to their members through the use of passion plays, liturgies and ritualistic meals.<sup>9</sup> Barclay contends that it was because of this context that sacramentalism degenerated to a magical, superstitious rite. Europe readily accepted the new sacramental faith (Christianity) probably because sacramental acts of worship were common already among the mystery cults.<sup>10</sup>

It seems evident that the early Church viewed the Lord's Supper as a sort of mysterion. Barclay, however, does not make light of the

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 98      <sup>7</sup>Tacitus, The Annals I: 8, 28.

<sup>8</sup>Pliny, Letters X: LII.

<sup>9</sup>Barclay, p. 11; cf. Samuel Angus, The Religious Quests of the Graeco-Roman World (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), p. 136f.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

fact that, "from beginning to end a sacramentum means a complete and solemn promise of complete and absolute and, if need be, sacrificial loyalty."<sup>11</sup> Even the mystery cults would have acknowledged this, since presumably no initiate was allowed to see or participate in a sacramentum until well instructed in its meaning<sup>12</sup> and pledged to maintain its secret significance.

Another important Hellenistic legal term is diatheke, covenant, order or institution. It was originally a Greek term signifying

an arrangement made by one party with plenary power, which the other party may accept or reject, but cannot alter.... In literature the word can sometimes be used for a philosophical statement, ie: the spiritual legacy of a sage.... It is assumed that the last orders, sayings or admonitions of such a man are particularly binding.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the word came to signify a will, an arrangement instituted by one who wished to be certain that those who survived him would take some particular actions.

The word anamnesis, remembrance, may have belonged to the same word field. Lietzmann notes that the commandment, "Do this in remembrance of me," may be a formula derived from the common practice of holding meals for remembrance of the dead.<sup>14</sup> The principal figures in great schools were often honored in this way.<sup>15</sup> Though Jeremias effectively demonstrates that these meals of remembrance could not have been

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 8f.

<sup>12</sup>a point Barclay says the modern church needs to relearn.

<sup>13</sup>Johannes Behm, "The Greek Term Diatheke", in Gerhard Kittel (ed.) Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), II, p. 124f.

<sup>14</sup>Lietzman, p. 41ff.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

the source of the Eucharistic tradition,<sup>16</sup> he does not deny that their existence may have colored the presuppositions of some of the early Christians when they took Communion.

Thus it is conceivable that in taking communion a Hellenistic Christian would have presupposed that he or she was affirming a commitment, even an obligation, to the One who established the practice; that in remembering His death the follower affirmed his or her allegiance to Jesus and to the task of obeying His commandments: to love the Lord God and to love one's neighbors as one loves oneself.<sup>17</sup> The Hellenist would certainly have presupposed an ethical significance in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

#### JUDAIC PRESUPPOSITIONS

For the children of Israel table fellowship itself was a symbol of commitment. "Those who sit at a meal are committed to each other, and committed to their host, and their host is committed to them."<sup>18</sup> The daily meal or deipnon was evidence of Yahweh's commitment to His people. The beraka or thanksgiving prayer reflects a deep awareness of human dependence upon this divine commitment.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, eternal King, Who  
feedest the whole world with thy goodness, with grace, with  
loving kindness and with tender mercy. Thou givest food to  
all flesh for thy loving kindness endureth forever. Through

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<sup>16</sup>Jeremias, p. 243ff: (1) the absence of the eis anamnesin construction, (2) occur only annually on deceased's birthday, not weekly like the Eucharist, (3) the increasing worldliness of the feasts.

<sup>17</sup>Matt 22: 37-39.

<sup>18</sup>Barclay, p. 95; cf. Ps. 23: 5; William R. Smith, Religion of the Semites (New York: Meridian, 1956), p. 265.



thy great goodness food hath never failed us: O may it not fail us forever, for Thy great Names' sake, since Thou nourishest and sustainest all living things and doest good unto all, and providest food for all Thy creatures, whom Thou has created. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who givest good unto all.<sup>19</sup>

At the sabbath meal the kiddush prayer acknowledges Yahweh not only as creator of the fruit of the vine which is about to be consumed, but of the whole creation upon which the nation which was led out of Egypt depends.<sup>20</sup> Lietzmann sees much similarity between the "kiddush meal" and the Lord's Supper.<sup>21</sup> Jeremias discounts this theory, pointing out that "kiddush meals" are a modern invention since kiddush stands simply for a special blessing inserted into the normal grace before the meal on special days.<sup>22</sup> In rejecting hypotheses that the Lord's Supper evolved from anything but the passover meal, Jeremias describes the ethical character of all Jewish meals.

Every meal had a "religious solemnity" because of the grace that was always said, irrespective of whether it was taken alone or in company, or of whether it was a mere snack or a formal meal with which the wine was taken. Certainly "fellowships" are occasionally mentioned in connection with ritual meals, but these "fellowships" were haburot miswah, ie: "fellowships for the observance of a commandment," and the haburah meals in which they took part, and to the cost of which they subscribed, were exclusively duty meals, such as those connected with betrothels, weddings, circumcisions, funerals in which participation as a paying guest was considered meritorious. That these fellowships, which, moreover, were of a charitable nature, (...these charitable fellowships were connected with the Pharisaic fellowships, although this can only be suggested, not proven) or other "communities of friends" met at any time "whenever they felt the need to do so" to hold a ritual meal, let alone a sacramental meal, cannot be proven.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Westminster, Md: Dacre Press, 1954), p. 53.

<sup>20</sup>Lietzmann, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>22</sup>Jeremias, p. 27f.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 30 nn. 3,4,5.

Though these meals infer ethical presuppositions, the major festivals<sup>24</sup> require them. "The law of the feast was open-handed hospitality; no sacrifice was complete without guests, and portions were freely distributed to rich and poor within the circle of a man's acquaintance."<sup>25</sup>

These festival meals centered around the sacrifice of animals, whose blood and intestinal fat were burned as an offering,<sup>26</sup> the flesh being served to all of the people.<sup>27</sup> Not every sacrifice involved animals, especially not large animals. It was normally only on major feast days, during times of great crisis or when an especially important covenant was to be ratified that large animals were sacrificed and shared with all of the members of the community.<sup>28</sup> These sacrificial feasts which were consumed at the temple, "in the presence of Jehovah ..., established a covenant fellowship on the one hand between Him and the guests, and on the other hand between the guests themselves reciprocally."<sup>29</sup>

Johannes Behm notes the similarity between the Hebrew words for food (its root means "to eat") and covenant.<sup>30</sup> Though not enough evidence exists to show that "to eat" is the root meaning for covenant, Behm infers that they may have been used in the same context.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> cf. Exodus 23: 14-16: The Feast of Unleavened Bread (The Passover), the Feast of the Harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering.

<sup>25</sup> Smith, p. 253f.

<sup>26</sup> Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel (Edinburgh: Black, 1885), p. 71; Max Thurian, The Eucharistic Memorial (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 40f.

<sup>27</sup> Deut 16: 11, II Sam 6: 19

<sup>28</sup> Wellhausen, p. 52f.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>30</sup> Behm, p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Another, probably older, connotation of the Hebrew root for covenant suggests that something (an animal) is cut. Behm identifies the covenant ceremony between Jacob and Laban<sup>32</sup> as a form including all of the essential elements for the legal ratification of the covenant.<sup>33</sup>

(1) The Hebrew term for "to cut" summarizes the entire transaction; (2) a record is given of the "divine attestation and the unalterable validity of the compact;" (3) details of the agreement are announced; (4) an oath is taken, acknowledging the divine guarantee; (5) the animal is sacrificed, and (6) all who have participated in the covenant (and are now bound together as brothers and sisters) share a common meal. The animal is a symbolic substitute for the severity of the result should either party break the covenant. Thus by eating the flesh of the sacrificed animal, the participants incorporate- physically, legally and spiritually- the agreement in their own lives.

This covenantial relationship, reflecting "the free declaration of the divine will to man's salvation..., God's will..., a binding norm of conduct...is the epitome of Jewish religion."<sup>34</sup>

One feast, more than any other, typifies the Jewish attitude toward sacrificial, covenantial meals: the Passover or Feast of Unleavened bread. Whether or not the Christian Eucharist is an adaptation or development of the Passover is one of the important questions addressed by Biblical scholars. Though there is much disagreement as to whether Jesus re-interpreted the Passover at His Last Supper, there is general

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<sup>32</sup>Gen 31: 44ff.      <sup>33</sup>Behm, p. 113.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 126ff., cf. Septuagint, Apocrypha, and Pseudoepigrapha, and Sir. 39: 8, Ps. Sol. 10:5.

agreement, by virtue of the synoptic gospels and St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, that the early Church believed that the Lord's Supper replaced the Passover meal. For that reason it is important to look carefully at the Passover celebration; not to determine whether or not the Lord's Supper replaces it, but to reveal the ethical nature of the act which was presupposed by the early Christians who gave it that significance.

According to Jeremias<sup>35</sup> the Passover celebration consisted of four main parts: a preliminary course, the Passover liturgy, the main meal and the conclusion. The preliminary course began with a kiddush prayer; then a preliminary dish of bitter herbs and pureéd fruits was eaten and the meal proper was served, but not eaten.<sup>36</sup> The liturgy began with the haggadah or account of the exodus, followed by singing the first part of the Passover hallel.<sup>37</sup> In the first part of the hallel the members of the cult community are called servants.

This designation, which is borrowed from the service rendered at the court of a prince, equally expresses their privilege and their duty, and comprises deeply rooted characteristics of the Old Testament religion, the unconditional obligation in face of God's commandments and the joy of being allowed to live in permanent relationship with him.<sup>38</sup>

Psalms 113 glorifies the sovereignty of God over all of the nations and over all of their history and over all of the created order, and it emphasises the grace of God.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Jeremias, pp. 85ff.      <sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., cf. Ps. 113, 114.

<sup>38</sup>Arthur Weiser, The Psalms (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 706.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 707f.

The psalmist grasps the greatness of God in all its fullness only as he comes to realize that it is precisely the afflicted, those whom men despise and reject, for whom God cares.... What is made impossible by human custom is made possible by God; he lifts the lowly from the dust (cf. I Sam 2:8, I Kings 16:2; Job 5:11) and gives them a place of honor among the princes of the nation (cf. Job 36:7).<sup>40</sup>

Then a second cup of wine is taken. The main meal begins with a grace by the paterfamilias, head of the family, over the unleavened bread, then comes the meal of lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs and pureed fruit. Then grace is said over the third cup of wine. Finally the second half of the hallel is sung and the ritual ends with praise over the fourth, and final, cup of wine.<sup>41</sup>

The annual Passover meal, then, reaffirmed God's sovereignty and grace and served as a recommitment between God and the nation of Israel. It reminded the Hebrews of their obligation to God to maintain stewardship of His land and uphold justice among His people.

The meal requires four cups of wine, and this is significant, since in Jesus' time as now many people were unable to afford wine.

It was...customary to do something for the poor on the Passover night. Even the poorest had the right to four cups of wine, "even if it is from the pauper's dish (ie: from charity)." An ancient Aramaic Passover saying, spoken by the paterfamilias, (spoken from the open door of the house) ran: "Behold, this is the bread of affliction, which our fathers had to eat as they came out of Egypt. Whoever hungers let him come and eat, and whoever is in need, let him come and keep the Passover (with us)." That this invitation to the poor to come to the Passover table was not only theoretical, can be seen from an incidental remark in the Mishnah, that it was not unusual to "invite somebody from the street to the Passover meal."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.      <sup>41</sup>Jeremias, p. 86; cf. Ps. 115-118.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 54; the meal, eaten in remembrance of poverty and slavery, affirms a "right" to food and drink. U.S. Senate Congressional Resolution 66, Dec. 1975, "The Right to Food", affirms this right.

Not only was the sacrificial meal essential in affirming the covenant, but the way the meal was served incorporated a concern for the poor and hungry. Clearly anyone associating the Lord's Supper with the Passover feast could assume that it was a symbolic affirmation of the covenant and a practical expression of concern for the poor, who held special importance for the God of the covenant. The association between the Passover and the Eucharist strongly implies an attitude of responsibility, not only toward the poor, but toward the land. It is an attitude of respect for the things in God's creation, an awareness of His sovereignty and will for justice.

The Passover meal is also a celebration of the salvation history of the Hebrew people, and thus an expression of hope. It was expected that in the final days, when the parousia came, all of God's people would be invited by the Messiah to a banquet where the flesh of the beasts Leviathan and Behemoth, which God reserved for the occasion on the fifth day of creation, would be served.<sup>43</sup> The Passover feast was eaten in anticipation of the messianic banquet, and tradition said, the Messiah would come at midnight on the anniversary of the Passover in Egypt.<sup>44</sup> Thus the Passover for the Jews was the symbol of eschatological hope. Clearly, the Jewish Christians would hold a sense of hope, even expectation, at Passover time, but their hope centered upon Jesus, not the vague notion of a messiah implied in the Passover tradition, for they believed that Jesus had taken the place of the Passover lamb when He was crucified.

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<sup>43</sup>Barclay, p. 53f; Jeremias, p. 205ff.      <sup>44</sup>Jeremias, p. 206f.

## EARLY CHRISTIAN PRESUPPOSITIONS

Much of the scholarship which has been done on the Lord's Supper is devoted to the effort to identify its earliest form or forms.<sup>45</sup> Two theories stand out among those that have been suggested in this regard. Joachim Jeremias contends that the Lord's Supper was originally a Passover meal.<sup>46</sup> Hans Lietzmann suggests that the earliest practice of the Church was a combination of the haburah or table fellowship, perhaps a continuation of the table fellowship shared by Jesus with His followers, and a sacramental meal of remembrance of Jesus' death.<sup>46</sup>

If the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal, is it fair to assume that the same ethical presuppositions apply to it as apply to the Passover meal? Could the early Christians have understood their act as a re-affirmation of a covenant between themselves and a God who cares for the poor? Would they have tried to incorporate the ethical demands of such a covenant into the liturgy itself? Did they attach any eschatological significance to their liturgical celebration, and, if so, would this have influenced the way they interacted with others? It seems to me that the answers to these questions are all "yes." Yet it cannot be said that the early Christians practiced the Passover feast; theirs was a "Christian Passover."<sup>48</sup> They would have understood what they were doing as a new interpretation, a partial fulfillment, of the ancient act.

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<sup>45</sup>Ernst Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in his Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 108.

<sup>46</sup>Jeremias, p. 41f.

<sup>47</sup>Lietzmann, p. 204.

<sup>48</sup>Jeremias, p. 124, citing H. Schurmann, "Die Anfänge christlicher Osterfeier," Theologische Quartalschrift, XXXI (1951), 414.

Jeremias contends that "it is not the liturgy which stands at the very beginning, but the word and act of Jesus."<sup>49</sup> The significant act is Jesus' abstinence from eating and drinking with His disciples on the night of the Passover feast.<sup>50</sup> Thus the early Church fasted on the Passover night,<sup>51</sup> praying for their lost brothers and sisters in Israel who had not accepted the new covenant.<sup>52</sup> Yet fasting was characteristic only of this preliturgical phase and suited only to the time of the Passover, once each year. Most scholars agree that the earliest records known indicate that breaking bread was an important part of the Church's weekly activity.<sup>53</sup> The Church gathered to worship and to eat, to satisfy physical as well as spiritual hunger.<sup>54</sup>

During the meal a passage of Scripture was read, or explained, or discussed-- apparently by the president. Then followed hymns or psalms, sung by individuals; then a special course of "that most holy food the leavened bread," with salt and hyssop, out of reverence for "the sacred table, which lies in the outer temple." And then the festival was prolonged through the night, two choruses of men and women, each with its chosen leader singing together, or in turn with accompanying dances and gesticulations; the whole closing with a thanksgiving similar, apparently, to the Passover hallel, and with a prayer; after which they separated.<sup>55</sup>

This description by J.F. Keating of one of the early Christian meals

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.      <sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 217; cf. Diataxeis of the Apostles, Apostolic Constitutions, Didascalia.

<sup>52</sup>Hans Conzelmann, I Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 199, confirms the existence of the pre-Pauline formula which uses covenant and blood or atonement sacrifice and covenant sacrifice interchangeably.

<sup>53</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, p. 150.

<sup>54</sup>Barclay, p. 56.

<sup>55</sup>J.F. Keating, The Agape and the Eucharist in the Early Church (New York: AMS Press, 1969), p. 26, cf. Canons of Hypolytus, p. 112f.



suggests that some of the elements of the Passover meal were maintained by the Church. It was a celebration which occurred at night, including a symbolic meal (though leavened, rather than the important unleavened bread was used), reading of scripture (though it was not the haggadah), singing of psalms, and perhaps most importantly, the closing, which was "similar...to the Passover hallel." If in fact the early Christians adapted the form of the Jewish Passover meal to fit their own understanding of salvation history, is it possible that they presupposed a similar ethical significance to their meal?

Lietzmann's theory seems very attractive. He suggests that the Church gathered for table fellowship (haburah) following a form established by Jesus: blessing and breaking the bread at the beginning, enjoying the meal and the fellowship, and blessing and sharing the cup at the end.<sup>56</sup> The breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup were sacramental acts done in remembrance of what Jesus had done for them. This remembrance was not to be simply a recollection of the event.<sup>57</sup> The Church was commanded to do something: eat and drink, praying that the Spirit of God would be communicated through the food to the communicants, confirming their faith in Christ. The agape meal shared between the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup was a special way of remembering the quality of the fellowship enjoyed in Christ's presence. It was a real meal,<sup>58</sup> a love feast.

Tertullian not only describes the meal, but identifies one of its purposes, Christian charity or "agape."

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<sup>56</sup>Lietzmann, p. 185; Conzelmann disagrees. <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>58</sup>Barclay, p. 57; cf. Jude 12, II Peter 2: 13f.

Our dinner shows its idea in its name; it is called by the Greek name for love (agape). Whatever the cost, it is gain to spend in piety's name, for with that refreshment we help the needy. No, not...to fatten (ourselves) at the cost of any insult, because with God there is greater consideration for those of lower degree. If the motive of the banquet is honest, take the motive as the standard of the other proceedings required by our rule of life.... Every man once a month brings some modest coin.... You might call them the trust funds of piety...to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parent, and then for slaves grown old and shipwrecked mariners; and any who be in mines, islands or prisons...."<sup>59</sup>

The meal was an act of piety. Money was collected for the poor and only enough food and drink were consumed to satisfy the appetite, being careful to have enough left over so that the host could send it to whoever was in need.<sup>60</sup>

Sharing was not only a characteristic of the Eucharistic meal; it was a general characteristic of the early Church fellowship, which was called koinonia.<sup>61</sup> Another word which characterized the Sacrament as well as the Church's fellowship was "communion." "The word 'community' and its cognates 'communion' (fellowship) (and) 'communication' come from a Latin word whose origin probably goes back to the Sanskrit word 'manus' meaning 'service, obligation, duty.'"<sup>62</sup> Apparently the

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<sup>59</sup>Tertullian, Apology, XXXIX: 16-17, 5-6; Lietzmann, p. 164 notes that the term agape is also used in Africa to describe the institution established to feed necessitous fellow believers; Gottfried Quell, "Agape", in Kittel, I, p. 22 notes that the semitic root of the term agape restricts the concept of love to that of pity for the needy. Clearly agape meals were associated with acts of charity in the Church.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.; Barclay, p. 59; cf. Hippolytus, Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition.

<sup>61</sup>Friedrick Hauck, "Koinonos, Koineo, Koinonia, Sugkoinonos, Sugkoinoneo," in Kittel, III, p. 797f.

<sup>62</sup>Philipp Potter, "General Secretary's Address to the Fifth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches" (Nairobi: World Council of Churches, 1975), Document #A 4, p. 1.

early Christians identified themselves not only by the Liturgy, but by the Liturgy's influence upon the way that they related to each other. Sharing what they had with the poor was an expression of solidarity with them and an act of piety, service, duty and faith in Christ.

Lietzmann is credited with the theory of the two meals: agape and Eucharist, fellowship and sacrament, which, as the evidence suggests, strongly infers a charitable presupposition in the meal. Yet he considers the "eleemosynary character" of the meal, which would de-emphasise its liturgical aspect, as secondary.<sup>63</sup> Clearly Lietzmann does not intend for his theory to detract from the liturgical conception of the Eucharist. It seems to me, however, that if one can posit the existence of two types of meals, which were originally meant to occur at the same occasion, that it is legitimate to suggest that at least two purposes were presupposed for the meal: liturgical remembrance and charitable fellowship. The blessing and breaking of the bread with the words of interpretation seem properly to require liturgical form and consistency, while the agape meal could have been for purposes of charity and fellowship. Liturgy is primary for the liturgical part of the event. Charity and fellowship are primary for the meal which fell between the two acts of worship. The two were intended to complement each other; that is why they would have occurred together.

This interpretation, still concerned with the ethical presuppositions of the act, is born out by the manner in which the meal was to be served, which may be derived from the Greek term diakonia, service.

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<sup>63</sup>Lietzmann, p. 162.

The root meaning of diakonein is "to wait on table," ie: waiter is the meaning of diakonia.<sup>64</sup> From this the meaning was expanded by the early Church to mean "a service of the physical and material needs of men."<sup>65</sup>

Diakonia, a service of deeds of love and mercy, is not merely something that Christians may and must do for the poor and needy when they are dispersed in the world. Diakonia has its seat in the church service. It is an integral part of public worship. It is the ethical act that complements, attests, and confirms the preaching of the gospel.<sup>66</sup>

This liturgical and ethical act was a form of corporate proclamation and commitment to the gospel. The Christians celebrated a meal in remembrance of, in fellowship with, the resurrected Jesus, and they shared it with hungry men and women. "Following the church service deacons visited and ministered to widows, orphans, the poor and those in prison."<sup>67</sup>

Then, the two services were separated.<sup>68</sup> By the third or fourth century the agape was nothing more than a charity meal. "In the Didascalia it has become a meal for old women. In Chrysostom it has become a meal which the rich provide after the sacrament. In Augustine it has become a charity supper."<sup>69</sup> The very thing which had given the meal such deep meaning, the fellowship between people from all levels of society, was probably the thing that caused its demise. The meal was abused. Social inequality became a sharp and painfully divisive factor when Christians gathered for agape and Eucharist. Instead of love

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<sup>64</sup>Arthur C. Cochrane, Eating and Drinking with Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 89.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Bultmann, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup>Barclay, p. 60; cf. Chrysostom, Homily 22, Augustine, C. Faust 20:20; see Darwell Stone, A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist (London: Longmans, Green, 1909) for a comprehensive history.

transcending social barriers, the Church's meals took on a paternalistic form of charity which robbed the poor of their dignity.

Paul is accused of separating the two meals.<sup>70</sup> In his first letter to the Corinthians rebukes the church members for allowing the Sacrament's purpose to be abused.

It should have been a meal of sharing; it should have been a meal at which rich and poor, high and low sat down together in perfect fellowship. In fact, it has become a meal at which some feed to excess and to drunkenness (while)...some starved.<sup>71</sup>

The divisions to which Paul refers in his letter are, says Conzelmann, theological schisms over the Eucharist.<sup>72</sup> Some perceived the Body of Christ as the unity of His Church, sharing the meal together. Others understood it as individual spirituality. It is the latter attitude which Paul criticises.<sup>73</sup> Yet "Paul is not giving regulations from the standpoint of charity, nor on the basis of unity...: the reproof here is to...the one who does not distribute equal shares with those who eat with him."<sup>74</sup> Paul is not saying that the Church must share its meal with hungry people, but that when the rich and poor do share a sacramental meal, everyone should receive an equal share of the food. Apparently Paul presupposed that both wealthy and poor members would be present at the meal, and that fellowship between them was essential to it. If they could not have fellowship during the agape, then each should eat to satisfy hunger at home and have fellowship during the Liturgy.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>A.J.B. Higgins, The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Chicago: Regnery, 1952), p. 71; cf. I Cor. 11: 17-22.

<sup>71</sup>Barclay, p. 56. <sup>72</sup>Conzelmann, p. 194.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid. <sup>74</sup>Ibid., cf. I Cor. 11: 21

<sup>75</sup>I Cor. 11: 33,34.

Against Conzelmann's position, it is unlikely that Paul would have abolished the agape part of the sacred meal. As will be shown in the next chapter, Paul was addressing the wealthy members of the community at Corinth, saying, "If you can't do it right, don't do it at all." Yet the intent of this exhortation was to convince the people at Corinth to celebrate the Eucharist properly, ie. by including the poor in both aspects of the meal. This was part of the essential unity of the Body of Christ. Conzelmann does point out that eating the meal without the community was unbecoming the people of the Lord. There can be no Eucharist without the community. "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself."<sup>76</sup> Paul knew that in Christ's eyes there is no community if the poor are not included. For Paul to contribute to the hunger of the poor by eliminating those who provide much of the food which was shared at the agape meal is unthinkable. The Church expected the parousia.<sup>77</sup> They expected the poor and hungry to be exalted and the rich and mighty to be put down.<sup>78</sup> Is it conceivable that they would not make every effort to identify with and serve the poor? I suggest that this concern extended even, indeed especially, into the community meal, and that Paul would have suggested the separation of the agape from the Eucharist only as a radical reproof to shock the Corinthians into compliance with the sacramental ethos.

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<sup>76</sup>I Cor. 11: 29; Conzelmann, p. 202.

<sup>77</sup>I Cor. 4:5, 11: 26      <sup>78</sup>Luke 1: 52, 53; 6:20 cf. 24.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Hellenists, Jews and early Christians could have presupposed that their participation in the Lord's Supper was an ethical act as well as an act of worship and fellowship.

The Hellenistic Christians would have understood the Eucharist as a pledge of allegiance to their Lord, a life commitment to fulfill His will. They would have remembered the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus as a commission, which they were pledged to carry out. That mission was to proclaim salvation through Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. This proclamation was made not only by preaching, but by sharing a meal. Jesus had proclaimed salvation by eating and drinking with sinners, outcasts, derelicts, a practice to which the Pharisees objected strenuously,<sup>79</sup> but which would have been easily understood by the Hellenists who appreciated the value of symbolic actions. Eating a meal at which God was the host and to which all in the community were equally entitled was common in the Hellenistic culture. To a Hellenistic Christian the Lord's Supper implied a sense of corporate responsibility for the welfare of all of the Lord's people, especially the poor.

For the Jews, the ethical sense of responsibility for the poor as well as for the land upon which they were dependent, was central to their tradition. It was part of the presupposition at every meal and especially at the Passover meal with which the Lord's Supper was associated by the early Church. The Passover meal affirmed a covenantal

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<sup>79</sup>Jeremias, p. 204; cf. Matt 11: 19 and par.

relationship between God and His people, Israel. The covenant was manifest in an ethical code, the law pronounced in the Torah. The law clearly revealed God's commitment to the outcast and helpless among His children. The salvation history of a weak, helpless people is grounded firmly in the Exodus event which is recalled annually at the Passover feast. The Jewish Christians of course understood Jesus of Nazareth as one fulfillment of the promise of salvation inherent in the exodus. The next step was to be the messianic banquet, a fellowship between the Savior and the saved. Thus the Jews affirmed a new covenant in the meal, dedicated to loving their Lord and others through service.

The tradition of service, diakonia, was strengthened in the early Church in which the Lord's Supper developed not only as a liturgy and remembrance of the fellowship and salvation offered by Jesus through meals, but as a form of ministerial service and outreach to the helpless in the wider community. Barclay and Cochrane contend that in separating the Eucharist from the agape, the profound salvific significance of the meal--both proclamation and response to the gospel--was destroyed, replaced by a mysterious, magical act which emphasised personal piety over corporate proclamation and service. That is, the Eucharist came to symbolize the very thing which Paul sought to avoid.

For Paul, the Sacrament of Holy Communion was intended to be a visible sign of both the grace of God and the works of His people in the proclamation of salvation. This has profound theological importance for an understanding of the ethical implications of the Lord's Supper for a response to the problem of hunger, and is the topic of the next chapter.



### Chapter III

#### ST. PAUL'S THEOLOGICAL ETHIC OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth bears evidence of the existence of a well-developed Eucharistic theology<sup>1</sup> and ethic.<sup>2</sup> "Paul's ethic is itself sacramental (in his sense), ie. that it is historically, christologically and eschatologically tied down, a specifically theological ethic and an ethical theology."<sup>3</sup> History, theology, christology, eschatology and ethics are all important parts of the Last Supper as Paul interprets it. The sacramental meal provides a rich medium through which Paul's distinctive message can be expressed, namely, that the Church is the Body of Christ which proclaims through word and service the new covenant in the death of Jesus Christ and is, therefore, a sign of hope for the world. Paul formulates this theological ethic

by making of every concrete question about relation to others (Chapters 8, 9) a question about the relation to God (Chapter 10), and from the question of decision between two given possibilities to expose the question of obedience to God as the really decisive one. Thus the solution of the ethical conflict is to be achieved in a strictly theological judgement (krinein, I Cor. 10: 15)."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Jean-Jacques von Allmen, The Lord's Supper (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969), p. 13; citing Paul Neuenzeit, Das Herrenmahl; Studien zur Paulinischen Abendmahlsaufassung (Munich: Kosel-Verlag, 1960), p. 238.

<sup>2</sup>Hans von Soden, "Sacrament and Ethics in Paul," in Wayne Meeks (ed.) The Writings of St. Paul (New York: Norton, 1972), p. 263; see also I Cor. 10: 23-33, 11: 17-34.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 266.

Von Soden's insights into the nature and method of Paul's theological ethic are helpful not only in understanding his instructions to the Corinthians regarding the Eucharist; they are also helpful in relating the sacrament's theological-ethical implications for the problem of hunger. They suggest a methodology for this chapter, namely, first to understand Paul's distinctive message, then to see how that message is communicated to the Corinthians in the form of a theological ethic in the Lord's Supper. Application of this ethic to the problem of hunger will be the subject of the fourth and final chapter of this study.

#### PAUL'S THEOLOGICAL ETHIC

##### The Church is the Body of Christ

Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."<sup>5</sup>

Paul had been persecuting the followers of Jesus. It was not until he was converted that he understood that in persecuting the followers of Christ, he was persecuting Christ. Thus from an experience of almost incredible power Paul began to relate to the Church as the Body of Christ.

In the Jewish context in which Paul had been operating it was presupposed that a person's body (especially Christ's body for Paul) was "a transcending pattern of life...making other people and the world constitutive of his most intimate being..., the principle of communal

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 267.      <sup>5</sup>Acts 9: 3-5.

solidarity rather than the source of personal isolation."<sup>6</sup> Rolf Knierim refers to this as the concept of corporate personality.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of corporate personality or sociality means that the matrix of human existence is the community of which the individuals are members, and not the individuals of which an accumulation makes a society.... It is one of the matrices for the emergence of ethos which is above all social ethos. Social responsibility is inherent in (this) social human condition.<sup>8</sup>

Paul understood the nature of this social responsibility, indeed, the nature of human existence, to be determined by one's involvement in the universe, in the struggle between heavenly and earthly powers. "It is conditioned by the answer to the question: 'To which power do you belong? Which Lord do you serve?'"<sup>9</sup> Thus the Body of Christ as it was revealed to Paul was the corporate identity of the Church, and this identity carried with it an ethos of responsibility for the condition of the world, even for the condition of the universe.

#### Which is Called to Proclaim by Word and Service

The Lord's Supper for Paul was a uniquely fitting context in which both verbal and actual proclamation could occur.<sup>10</sup> The Eucharist

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur A. Vogel, Is the Lord's Supper Finished? (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Rolf Knierim, "The Spirituality of the Old Testament As Global Responsibility" (unpublished paper provided as a text to a course entitled "Global Responsibility and Subjective Religiosity in Old Testament Spirituality" at the School of Theology at Claremont, 1975), p. 24; see also A.J.B. Higgins, The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Chicago: Regnery, 1952), p. 69.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Käsemann, "The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," in his Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, p. 313.

itself was the symbol of that which was to be proclaimed: the presence of the resurrected Body of Christ. The bread symbolized this presence. "The bread which we break, is it not a participation (koinonia) in the Body of Christ? Because there is one loaf we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf."<sup>11</sup> The cup of wine, His blood, symbolized the new covenant which was to be proclaimed.<sup>12</sup> The bread and wine, body and blood, were to be consumed by those assembled. It was not that they were consuming Christ's flesh (sarx), ie. that which distinguished Him from God.<sup>13</sup> They were consuming the body (soma), the physical life of Jesus which was dedicated to living for God, not for self.<sup>14</sup> The communion fellowship was between He who had lived and died to bring about God's kingdom and those who expected to see that kingdom realized. The important thing about the meal, however, was not its elements, but the proclamation of the event which called them into being.<sup>15</sup> "The eating and drinking are accompanied, and interpreted by the proclamation of the Lord's death, in virtue of which his body and his blood are understood to be for us."<sup>16</sup> This proclamation affirmed the presence of the body of Christ through the presence of the gathered community and

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<sup>11</sup>I Cor 10: 16b-17.      <sup>12</sup>see below, p. 33f.

<sup>13</sup>Vogel, p. 71. Paul uses sarx to describe the physical being of man continuous with the earth (sinfulness) and in contrast to God (righteousness). Here again is reference to Paul's conception of the human condition, caught in the struggle between earthly and heavenly powers.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>C.K. Barrett, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 270f.; cf. I Cor 11: 26. Barrett suggests that the existence of this proclamation may explain the continuity between the synoptic gospels of the passion narrative.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 273; cf. I Cor. 11: 24.

the words of interpretation spoken over the elements. Again from his Jewish tradition, Paul equated the presence of Christ's words with the presence of his face.

For the Jews a person could be seen just as completely in his word (as in his face). Word and face were both identified with personal being; thus a person's words as well as his face were means of confrontation.

As the word dabar, which meant "word," was used in Old Testament times it could signify "thing" and "event" as well as an oral or written word. It was often used to designate something done as well as something spoken; realizing the fulness of the word, we can understand why, when it did refer to something spoken, it was so easily identifiable with (the speaker).<sup>17</sup>

God's creative power was known through His word.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, until His incarnation in Christ, God's presence in history was known primarily through the word of His prophets.

It was the word uttered by great prophets of old that enabled the Israelites to see God's action in history; it was such speaking and hearing that enabled the Jews' history to be a vehicle of faith. The word enabled Jewish history to be a salvation history.<sup>19</sup>

Just as God was known to act in history, the word of Christ was known as act as well as voice.

Christ is the word who is action; in him word and creation cannot be separated. To have one's life centered in the Eucharist, then, is to have one's life centered in ongoing activity which, because it is so complete, must be proclaimed. Because the proclamation without activity is not the proclamation at all.<sup>20</sup>

Word and action were equally a part of the Eucharistic proclamation, and service was an essential implication of it.<sup>21</sup> Around these two aspects of proclamation the Church formulated a liturgy for worship. Proclaiming the divine word and action was the central purpose of the

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<sup>17</sup>Vogel, p. 110, cf. Hebrews 1:1-3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 111, cf. Gen 1: 3-31, Ps. 148:5.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 118. <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 131. <sup>21</sup>Kasemann, p. 130.

liturgy. The core of this liturgical proclamation was the Eucharist.<sup>22</sup>

The Christians' liturgy is to continue God's creation of the world through their incorporation into his Body-Word, Jesus Christ. In God's Community, his people receive his meaning (the word) in order to manifest that meaning through their bodily lives wherever they are in the universe."<sup>23</sup>

The liturgical act was not, could not be, only a symbolic act. To be a proclamation of the death of Christ it had to be an act of love. It was this act of love which was celebrated in the Holy Communion.<sup>24</sup>

If kataggellein is to be translated "proclaim," that fits in admirably with what has steadily come to be expected as the meaning of diatheke, "decree" or "ordinance". God's eschatological ordinance must be proclaimed on earth, and this is exactly what the assembled Christian community does when it celebrates the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup>

### The New Covenant

The diatheke to which Käsemann refers was understood as the Sinai covenant of Moses by the synoptic gospel writers, but Paul understood it as the "new covenant" which was promised by Jeremiah.<sup>26</sup> Dodd quotes the Septuagint version of this prophesy.

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah a new covenant, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt; because they did not abide by my covenant, and so I cared for them no longer, says the Lord. For this is the covenant

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<sup>22</sup>Vogel, p. 159. "Liturgy" comes from leiturgia, ie. from laos (people) and ergon (work), or "works of the people."

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 162. "The Latin root of 'celebrate' conveys the idea of 'public,' of action involving many people. It also connotes the idea of 'solemnization,' the doing of something with the full realization of what is done. Properly to celebrate, then, involves the public performance of some act with deliberate intention.... the Holy Eucharist celebrates the social nature of man."

<sup>25</sup>Käsemann, p. 120.

<sup>26</sup>Jer. 31: 31-34.

which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: putting my laws into their mind, I will also write them on their heart; and I will be a God to them, and they shall be a people to me. And they shall not teach everyone his fellow-citizen and everyone his brother, saying, "Know the Lord;" because they will all know me, from little to great among them, because I will be gracious to their injustices and will no more remember their sins.<sup>27</sup>

Dodd points out the four main features of this prophetic covenant.

(1) The law will be written on the hearts and minds of the people of Israel; (2) God and God's people will be intimately related; (3) everyone will know God, and (4) all human sins will be forgiven.<sup>28</sup> What better way can be imagined to celebrate the fulfillment of these conditions than through a sacrificial meal? It is no longer the law, but the spirit of the law to which the Christians pledge allegiance.<sup>29</sup> The intimate relationship between the risen Christ and His Body, the Church, was clearly reflected in the breaking and sharing of bread and cup.<sup>30</sup> That everyone would know God was the purpose of the proclamation, and the significance of Christ's death for the forgiveness of sins was among the most important meanings of the meal. Paul understood the Lord's Supper as a proclamation of the new covenant.

It should also be clear that the activity required of the Church by the new covenant, proclamation by word and service, cannot occur in isolation from the world.<sup>31</sup> To be "willing to come to the Lord's Supper is to will to do what Christ did-- and does."<sup>32</sup> "Selfishness and narrow

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<sup>27</sup>C.H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures (London: Nisbet, 1952), p. 44. Dodd suggests (p. 45) that Jeremiah's prophetic covenant was part of the Eucharistic tradition which Paul passed on to the Corinthians, i.e. it predated Paul's letter to Corinth.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>29</sup>cf. Mark 12: 28-34, parallels.

<sup>30</sup>Vogel, p. 81.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

defensiveness are foreign to Eucharistic living, because in such sacrifices the Church is itself offered in the offering it makes to God."<sup>33</sup>

"Responsibility for others was one of the first marks of the Christian community in New Testament times."<sup>34</sup> To proclaim Christ by service (diakonia) was to accept unselfish responsibility for the welfare, indeed, for the salvation of others.

### In the Death of Christ

It is implied that the new covenant has now been inaugurated, and inaugurated, as the old covenant was, by means of sacrifice. The new sacrifice is not (like that of Ex. 24:5) of oxen, but of Jesus. The shedding of his blood is the founding of the covenant in which men's sins are forgiven (cf. I Cor. 15: 3) and knowledge of God is conveyed.... The cup of blessing, drunk by all the participants in the meal, becomes (not, in Paul, actually the covenant of blood, but) the means by which the covenant is entered.... Those who enter into covenant with the Lord naturally enter at the same time into community with one another, and a covenant community is thereby established.<sup>35</sup>

The maintenance of this covenant and of the community which proclaims it requires that the covenantal ritual, the Lord's Supper, be repeated regularly as commanded by Jesus.<sup>36</sup>

The command to repeat the actions does not merely bind the community to celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly and thus keep alive in a literalistic way the meaning of the death of Jesus, but places upon it at the same time the obligation to proclaim the redemptive meaning of this death, as Paul himself lays down in his concluding gloss (vs. 26) and as the liturgy of the Lord's Supper (no doubt already in existence by this time) effectually does."<sup>37</sup>

The death of Christ fulfilled the legal requirement for a sacrifice to establish a new covenant. In addition, because of the nature of the

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 164; cf. Augustine, City of God X: 6.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 166. <sup>35</sup>Barrett, p. 269.

<sup>36</sup>cf. I Cor. 11: 24c and 25c. <sup>37</sup>Käsemann, p. 121.



covenant, which offered a new relationship based on love and grace between God and human beings, Christ's sacrifice also fulfilled the legal requirements for atonement of sins.<sup>38</sup> The sacrifice has been offered, the body broken (cut?) and consumed by the covenant partners, who now incorporate the Body of Christ.

#### And Is Therefore a Sign of Hope to the World

The congregation as the "Body of Christ" is the place where the love of the Lord given in death is to be experienced, and therefore "edification" in responsibility for the brethren is the only criterion by which even the "gifts of the spirit" are to be judged, namely as gifts of grace and service.<sup>39</sup>

Service, like grace, is a gift from God which provides "edification" for the church which reveals Christ's love. It is not an obligation forced by law, but an experience of fulfillment, the result of Christian love, agape, freely given.

That divine gifts should be communicated during a meal is entirely consistent with oriental cultures and eschatological traditions of the early Christian era.<sup>40</sup> They were "a foretaste of the messianic banquet, ie. of the feast provided by the Messiah in the age to come."<sup>41</sup>

Jeremias presents an interesting theory as to the theological-ethical implications of this eschatological expectation. He suggests

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<sup>38</sup>Barrett, p. 272.

<sup>39</sup>Günther Bornkamm, Early Christian Experience (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 152.

<sup>40</sup>Joachim Jeremias, Eucharistic Words of Jesus (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 233.

<sup>41</sup>J.G. Davies, The Early Christian Church (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 81.

that the followers of Jesus were enjoined by their master's command, "Do this in remembrance of me,"<sup>42</sup> to gather daily "as the redeemed community by the table rite, that in this way God may be daily implored to bring about the consumation in the parousia."<sup>43</sup> The function of the sacrament was to bring in the new age through daily and earnest prayer, proving to God by their presence that the salvation work had been begun and asking that it be completed. A.D. Müller applies this theory to the theological ethic of the sacrament.

The objective theological content of the Lord's Supper and the activity of the community are not mutually exclusive, but rather one demands the other. Precisely because God Himself is the acting subject of the service in the vicarious death of the servant of God for the "many," the world's people, the community is included in the sacramental accomplishments, not only as object but also as subject with full responsibility.<sup>44</sup>

Hans Conzelmann dismisses Jeremias' theory simply by pointing out that it contradicts the plain wording of the command, "Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>45</sup> In addition Barrett, while he doesn't come to a conclusion, submits that the Greek terms used in the phrase "until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26) always introduce the prospect of attaining the eschatological goal.<sup>46</sup> Would it place too much strain on this admittedly thin evidence to suggest that the Christians expected the parousia to be realized rather than hoped (and prayed) for it? Conzelmann's point is well taken, and, while I would agree that Jeremias' theory is

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<sup>42</sup>I Cor. 11: 24c, 25c. <sup>43</sup>Jeremias, p. 255.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., n. 2, A.D. Müller, (letter dated May 13, 1950).

<sup>45</sup>Hans Conzelmann, I Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 198f.

<sup>46</sup>Barrett, p. 270f., cf. Rom. 11: 25, I Cor. 15: 25, Luke 21:24.

unlikely, the comments of his colleague, A.D. Müller, are very attractive. It occurs to me that Müller's statement may be true even if Jeremias' is not. If one reads it in reference to the full experience, Eucharist and agape meal, shared with the poor and outcast, then it is quite consistent with the Pauline view thus far described. In addition to this the eschatological expectation of the early Church (at least according to Matthew) was that judgement would occur before the messianic banquet.<sup>47</sup> The basis of this judgement by the risen Christ would be the witness of the poor: the hungry, the naked, those in prison. "Truly I say to you, as you did it (or did it not) to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it (or did it not) to me."<sup>48</sup> "When a man is judged in the judgement 'according to his works' that means he is asked about his relationship to Jesus Christ, to whom his works bear witness."<sup>49</sup> If the Church at Corinth shared the eschatological vision revealed in Matthew, then it is hardly possible that they would have allowed their Eucharistic celebrations to focus on prayer alone. Rather, it would seem more likely that they would have made every effort to minister to the needs of the poor while proclaiming their faith in Jesus Christ and their joy in serving Him. Through such a ministry, they would "participate" (koinonia) in the new eschatological order of salvation, in the reign of the exalted Christ, which was established by His death and resurrection.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Matt. 25: 31-46.

<sup>48</sup>Matt. 25: 40, (45).

<sup>49</sup>Gerhard Barth, "On the Essence of Being a Disciple," in Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 105.

<sup>50</sup>Bornkamm, p. 143.

It is clear that from the death of Christ for us (or in our place) directly follows the new situation of salvation, the new existence of the believers and with it also the new task of their life.... The death of Christ for all includes directly as a result the life of the believers for him, not only as a moral duty of gratitude but as a reality in the history of salvation, given with the event of salvation itself.<sup>51</sup>

This "new life in Christ" is the gift given to both those who minister and those for whom the ministry is made. The salvation is the newness of life lived in the vision of the new order, the Kingdom of God, which Paul and the early Christians fully expected to see fulfilled. "The Church as it met around the supper table would form a living link between the beginning and the end of the interim between the two comings of the Lord."<sup>52</sup>

#### THE CORINTHIANS' MISTAKE

Nearly everything that is known about Paul's sacramental theological ethic is contained in his first letter to the Corinthians. In that letter, he speaks of the Lord's Supper in only two passages.<sup>53</sup> In both he is responding to questions that have been put to him by members of the congregation.<sup>54</sup> Clearly there is strife in the Corinthian congregation over the sacrament.

The central question to which Paul responds in I Cor. 10: 1-22 is "What does responsibility for the brethren mean and demand?"<sup>55</sup> For I Cor. 11: 17-34 the question inferred is "What is the proper way to celebrate the Lord's Supper?" In the latter, Paul is obviously respond-

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., pp 143-144.

<sup>52</sup>Barrett, p. 271; Higgins, p. 62.

<sup>53</sup>Bornkamm, p. 123, cf. I Cor. 10: 1-22, 11: 17-34.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 123, 125.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

ing knowing more about the situation which generated the question than was implied when it was asked. Both questions provide the basic conditions for Paul's theological ethic of the Lord's Supper.<sup>56</sup>

### What's Happening in Corinth?

There are two "divisions" in the Corinthian church. Von Soden describes them as "the strong, the enthusiasts..., who believe that in the Body of Christ (for them that is the same thing as, with Christ in their body) nothing can hurt them, (and) the weak, who are terrified of every defilement."<sup>57</sup> The strong see nothing wrong in eating meat sacrificed to idols, (they aren't real gods anyway) or in taking a relaxed approach to the agape meal which preceeds the Eucharistic Sacrament.

It is clearly implied that the occasion included an ordinary meal, as well as symbolic acts and significant words.... The members of the Church were expected to share their resources, the rich presumably, to bring more than they needed and to make provision for the poor. In fact, the rich were bringing but eating and drinking the extra supplies themselves. This was not to eat the Lord's Supper but their own.<sup>58</sup>

"One could say that it is the (agape) meal in Corinth that has been profaned, not the sacramental act."<sup>59</sup> They probably interpreted the formal command, "Do this in remembrance of me" to mean "say a thanksgiving, and break and distribute the loaf (and cup) as my memorial."<sup>60</sup> Yet the significance of the words, as Paul understood them, was much greater than mere ceremonial memorial.

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<sup>56</sup>cf. p. 28 above. Bornkamm rightly notes that in I Cor. 11: 17-34 "the concern is not just 'ethical' questions." The concern is theological-ethical questions.

<sup>57</sup>Soden, p. 261. <sup>58</sup>Barrett, p. 262f. <sup>59</sup>Bornkamm, p. 129.

<sup>60</sup>Barrett, p. 267.

The cup of blessing (I Cor. 10: 16) is a means of sharing in the blood of Christ because believers...appropriate to themselves the benefits of his sacrificial death (Rom. 3:25, 5:9); they have communion with Christ crucified and risen again, because they show themselves ready to share in his sufferings (cf. Rom. 8: 17). There must be present to Paul's mind his idea of the cup as the new covenant in the blood of Christ (I Cor. 11:25). To partake of this cup is a criterion of readiness to share in his blood, in his suffering.<sup>61</sup>

To fail to prepare for the consequences of the new covenant was to abuse the Sacrament. Even worse was to "abolish the idea of receiving the body of Christ," to receive the bread as "ordinary food."<sup>62</sup>

The Corinthians have not done away with the sacramental Lord's Supper at all. On the contrary, they so completely regarded this as the main thing that the preceeding meal became a thing which one could shape according to his own likes and for his own enjoyment. Therefore they had few scruples about the injury to the poor and to the latecomers.<sup>63</sup>

It is, therefore, not against the elements of the meal (the bread and cup), but against the body (the Church) and blood (the new covenant) of Christ that the "strong" (and presumably the rich) have offended. It is an offense against the members of the community.<sup>64</sup> Without the economic freedom and mobility of their richer sisters and brothers, the poor evidently arrive late, when the feast has already begun, and instead of being invited to share the food, they are ignored, or worse, shamed. "The strong" offend against the Body of Christ by offending the poor. They break the new covenant by their failure to perceive the spiritual presence in their poorer brothers and sisters.

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<sup>61</sup>Higgins, p. 69.

<sup>62</sup>Hans Lietzmann, Mass and the Lord's Supper (Leiden: Brill, 1953-), p. 254.

<sup>63</sup>Bornkamm, p. 127.

<sup>64</sup>Conzelmann, p. 202; Barrett, p. 263.

Paul would normally have supported those whose faith was strong, but this time he could not condone their actions.<sup>65</sup> "Paul does not require that a man be morally faultless before he takes part in the meal; he does require that he should be applying moral scrutiny to his life and behavior."<sup>66</sup> The Eucharist to Paul is not an object, but a way of life.<sup>67</sup>

### Paul's Advise

Paul's concern is to communicate to the Corinthians that the sacraments, like the sacrifices and divine gifts of old Israel, do not provide "automatic" protection from punishment for disloyalty.<sup>68</sup>

The sacrament does not guarantee salvation; it establishes the possibility of obedience and the necessity for it. This new obedience is the gift of the Kyrios and the heavenly dimension, while earthly existence is rooted in disobedience.<sup>69</sup>

What Paul wants for the Corinthians is not their blind adherence to a legal code, but the salvation which is promised to those who believe in the Lord and continually choose, in freedom, to serve Him. "The sacrament mediates for him not Fate (as for the Hellenistic mystery cults), but the possibility of obedience as the eschatological gift and, at the same time, as responsibility 'before the face of Jesus Christ.'"<sup>70</sup>

The significance of the Lord's Supper thus rises from the Apostle's christology.<sup>71</sup> The Kyrios, or Risen Lord, is manifest, not by human, but by divine choice, in the Eucharist, setting the worship-

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<sup>65</sup>cf. I Cor. 11: 17.

<sup>66</sup>Barrett, p. 273.

<sup>67</sup>Allmen, p. 20.

<sup>68</sup>Higgins, p. 65, cf. I Cor. 10: 1-22.

<sup>69</sup>Kasemann, p. 119.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

pers in perspective of the Last Day. The worshippers may perceive the Lord as the One who will call for justice on that day. The "enthusiasts" or "strong ones" of Corinth believe that, since they have partaken of the body and blood of Christ, they will be exempt from the final judgement, that by virtue of the sacrament they are guaranteed a place at the messiah's table.<sup>72</sup> Paul perceives a greater danger in this.

This self-manifestation of Christ calls men to obedience and this means that, at the same time, it calls them to account before the final judge who is already today acting within his community as he will act towards the world on the Last Day--he bestows salvation by setting men within his lordship, and if they spurn this lordship, they then experience this act of rejection as a self-incurred sentence of death.<sup>73</sup>

Instead of standing strong in faith, "the strong" have fallen into the same abyss as the Jews, relying on petty rules and "minimal requirements" for salvation.<sup>74</sup> They "dissolved the tension of sacrament and ethic in a legal code that joins both but breaks both."<sup>75</sup> They have equated the power of the sacrament to the magical power of the meat offered to idols,<sup>76</sup> and this will bring down judgement upon them as surely as it was brought upon the people of Israel when they worshipped Baal.

In face of the self-manifestation of the Christ there are only two possibilities open (to the Corinthians)--either to unite with the Christian community in proclaiming the death of Jesus or to unite with the world in bringing it about.<sup>77</sup>

If one cannot perceive the Body of Christ, present in the gathered community, then it is because they are not maintaining the new covenant.

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.      <sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 126.      <sup>74</sup>Soden, p. 265.      <sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Bornkamm, p. 260, cf. I Cor. 10: 19-22.

<sup>77</sup>cf. I Cor. 11: 29.



They expose their own guilt by their actions at the sacred meal.<sup>78</sup> As a consequence they will die, and have been dying, before the parousia is fulfilled.<sup>79</sup>

The seriousness of the situation calls for drastic revision of the Corinthians' practice in Paul's view. He holds out hope that they may save themselves from judgement if they will satisfy their hunger at home, before gathering to celebrate the Eucharist.<sup>80</sup>

But this admonition initially says no more than this: feed the growling stomach what it needs at home, that such painful things as have happened in your midst are not repeated. Paul in no way had in mind a fundamental and definitive separation of the common meal and sacramental celebration.... Rather, for Paul meal and celebration still belong so closely together that he can maintain that the bad state of affairs in the common meal make the entire Lord's Supper illusory.<sup>81</sup>

The meaning inferred is "if you can't do it right, at least don't do it wrong," but it does not mean that the practice should be ceased.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Paul deals with the ethical conflicts over the Lord's Supper at Corinth by perceiving them in theological terms. When the actions of the worshippers toward each other are viewed as reflections of their obedience and love, or lack of both, toward the Risen Lord, then the seriousness of the situation becomes apparent. In disregarding the needs of the poor and "the weak" in spirit, the Corinthians have offended the Body of Christ, the Church. Paul understands the responsibility of the Church for creating a new ethos of love and acceptance

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<sup>78</sup> Kasemann, p. 123.

<sup>79</sup> Barrett, p. 274; cf. I Cor. 11: 30.

<sup>80</sup> cf. I Cor. 11: 33-34.

<sup>81</sup> Bornkamm, p. 129.

for the poor and outcast in society. The new covenant requires that they incorporate love for their brothers and sisters into their lives as a sign to the world of the presence of Christ and the promise of a new created order in the universe, the Kingdom of God. That this new relationship to others was made possible by the death of Christ was the central theme of the early Church's proclamation which was made both by word and by deeds of unselfish service, especially to the poor. In return for the maintenance of this covenant, the Lord provided the gifts of grace for forgiveness of sins and opportunities and fulfillment in service, ie. calls to ministry. In the final analysis the sacrament provides an opportunity for obedience to the new covenant, not a guarantee of salvation. Its main implication is responsibility, not piety.

## Chapter IV

### THE LORD'S SUPPER: AN ETHOS FOR CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HUNGER

The Biblical tradition of the Lord's Supper does not prescribe a specific response to the condition of hunger which confronts the world of today.<sup>1</sup> The specific social problems to which Paul and the early Christians addressed themselves were ethical problems confronting the Christian community as they learned how to care for each other.<sup>2</sup> Though the Christians and the Jews before them confronted injustice, hunger and poverty, the specific and complicated form of these problems which exists today did not exist in Biblical times.<sup>3</sup> Consequently we may not expect to find an ethical or theological prescription in the Lord's Supper to solve the problem of hunger.

What is clearly present and relevant to today's problems in the sacrament is an attitude, even a methodology, an ethos for appropriate response to the conditions which oppress the poor. Paul's instructions to the Corinthians and the cultural ethos of the Hellenistic and Judaic as well as the early Christian communities all reflect a concern that the sacred meal should not reflect a self-righteous piety nor a compla-

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur C. Cochrane, Eating and Drinking with Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster press, 1974), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Bock, In Search of a Responsible World Society (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Richard K. Taylor, Economics and the Gospel (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1973), p. 27f.

cent apathy in relating to the poor. This is a message which clearly needs to be heard today.

As Christians, we have to beware of the pretensions of super-human self-righteousness, but we also have to avoid a sub-human lack of accountability. Sin is not only pride but also sloth--failure to assume responsibility, world weariness and timidity, indifference to the plight of suffering humanity, apathy in the face of injustice that still acts to "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth."<sup>4</sup>

The presuppositions of the cultures in which the Lord's Supper developed indicate that the meal manifested an ethos of responsibility toward the poor. The reason for this sacramental ethos was the strong sense, shared by all three cultures, of covenantial relationships between themselves and God.

The Hellenists pledged their commitment to justice, over the administration of which the Kyrios had dominion, by sharing the sacrificial meal. They, as well as the Jews, believed that they were bound physically, spiritually and legally to uphold this justice, for they had shared the flesh of the life which was sacrificed to consecrate it. The Hellenists prayed in remembrance of their Lord that His presence would become manifest in the act which He had commanded before His death: the sharing of food.

The people of Israel occasionally held meals to joyfully celebrate their relation to and opportunity to serve Yahweh, whose law revealed a special caring for the poor and outcast. Of great significance to Jewish Christians was the covenant celebrated during the festival of the Passover. For this covenant God maintained His commitment to the

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp 28-29; cf. Amos 2: 7.

people by providing food, being sovereign over all of the land; and by establishing the code of justice, being sovereign over all nations. This was revealed in the exodus event which was a symbol of the promise of final salvation or parousia which would someday consummate all of history. In response to this gracious divine commitment, the people of Israel accepted responsibility to act as God's stewards, caring for the earth and maintaining God's laws. The entire covenant was celebrated during Passover by a meal which was shared by all in the community, including the poor and including Yahweh.

The Christians proclaimed that the salvation history begun in Israel would be fulfilled through the new covenant established by Jesus Christ. Their hope was founded upon His sacrificial example, and therefore upon acts of unselfish love and service toward each other and all of God's children. Their Eucharist was characterized by their koinonia or caring fellowship which Paul presupposed overcame all divisions of race and class, and by their diakonia, commitment to service. The meal celebrated their sense of corporate responsibility toward the poor and sick, the naked and those in prison, who when the parousia is realized, would provide the witness upon which divine justice would be based.

These presuppositions leave little doubt of the existence of an ethos of responsibility toward the poor, the oppressed, the hungry in ancient cultures. The question that remains, however, is "What does the sacrament mean in a context in which two thirds of the people of the world are hungry or starving and in which the ability of the biosphere to sustain fullness of life is threatened? Having re-exposed the ethos which was presupposed for the Lord's Supper two thousand

years ago, what does the sacrament imply today? Clearly our presuppositions are not the same as those of the Christians who first celebrated the meal. We cannot turn to the early Church for the solution to our present dilemma: how should the twentieth-century Church relate to the injustice of hunger? We can, however, turn to Paul's theological ethic for guidance in formulating our own hunger ethic. Thus, like Paul, we will be theologizing about a current problem, seeking guidance in our relationship with Christ.

Briefly, the theological ethic rests on four points. (1) The Church or Body of Christ is understood to be a corporate personality which, because of its relationship to God incarnate, bears responsibility for the condition not only of humanity and of the world, but of the entire created order, the universe. The Church, like the nation of Israel, is the agent of God, charged with the establishment of justice and the stewardship of the resources of the universe. (2) The identity and mission of this corporate personality result from the significance of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom God was revealed. The Church makes its identity and purpose known in two ways: by proclaiming Christ's death as the key to universal salvation from the consequences of corporate and personal sin and by revealing the truth of this salvation by serving others in a spirit of agape. The Eucharistic liturgy of the Church reveals the love of Christ for the world and its people. It compels the followers of Christ to express that same love for those who are oppressed. By Paul's example this was done by relating to the poor and oppressed in the same way that they would have related to the Lord, himself. (3) This implies the necessity of a Eucharistic life-

style, that is a lifestyle of self-giving, the perception of self as the agent of God's love. It implies a Christian vocation which calls the Church beyond concern for its own welfare to a concern for the welfare of others. Its concern extends beyond the survival of others to the establishment of conditions that are conducive to their fulfillment and vitality, providing hope for a quality of life, not merely the possibility of existence. (4) Acceptance of this responsibility provides a sign of hope for the fulfillment of human promise and for the maintenance of the goodness of the created order.

The thesis of this project is that the Eucharist implies a Christian ethos which impells the Church to fight the unjust causes of hunger. The Church response to hunger required by the Lord's Supper may be characterized in three ways: agape, justice and hope.

Though agape has come to be associated with charity, its original context and central meaning is service. The confusion comes about to the extent that the Church loses touch with its own identity. The Church must be able to identify itself as the Body of Christ in the broader social context, in the global community. It must be able to contrast itself to the accepted norms and divisions within society which are based upon wealth and power. Rather than paternalistic philanthropy, agape means to stand in solidarity with the poor, to identify and struggle with those who are without food, clothing, health and freedom. It presumes to proclaim in word and service a new reality, which values love above wealth and power. To do this, it is essential that the Church sharpen its awareness of reality. It must be informed as to the nature of the injustice whose symptom is hunger and against which it is

compelled to act. Otherwise its actions will be irrelevant to reality.

The second characteristic of the Christian response to hunger is justice. The covenantal presupposition behind the Lord's Supper implies that the source of all true justice is obedience to God, even to the point of personal sacrifice. Obedience to God requires the perception of God acting in history, meaning that the Church must not only be aware of reality, it must be constantly reflecting upon the meaning of events within reality. Moreover, it must interpret and proclaim the significance of events as components or adversaries of divine justice. It must, in other words, take a prophetic role within society. Ignacio Castuera once characterized Jesus as an "anti-realist" struggling against the real powers and principalities of His time and pronouncing bread and wine as His body and blood.<sup>5</sup> Two thirds of the world's people are poor and hungry; that is the reality against which the Church must set itself. It must establish a prophetic contrast to the reality of the hunger injustice around it. Its task is to create a new reality, not to concede reality to the powers of the present age.

Paul's theological ethic provides a methodology to guide this process. It is simply to interpret the predicament of the poor as the predicament of Christ, and therefore the predicament of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. When the Church understands itself as the victim of injustice, or at least when it responds to injustice as though it were the victim, it inherits the divine motivation (grace) to act as one with the poor, the hungry, the disenfranchised.

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<sup>5</sup>Ignacio Castuera, (a sermon, "The Lord's Supper" for the World Hunger: Education, Action Together, Pasadena, California, 1976).



The Church is God's advocate for the poor. It is important that this not be a false or hypocritical advocacy. If the Church acts without first discerning the Body of Christ, it brings judgement upon itself. The poor, not the Church, will be the witnesses for judgement. Proclamation of the divine demand for justice, not the judgement itself, is the task of the Church. Christian solidarity with the poor must not, furthermore, be viewed as a consequence of guilt. The good news is that Christ has already accepted responsibility for human shortcomings. Being guilty will add nothing to God's demand for justice. We are given freedom to act. We must act.

The full power of the divine motivation, grace or vocation, is released when received as a gift, not as a judgement. The responsibility of the individual Christian toward the poor is that of sharing and serving with them. It is not to bring salvation to them,<sup>7</sup> for that is what God has already done and continues to do through the whole Body of Christ, the Church. The new, sacramental, covenant affirms this not by the establishment of minimal expectations, guidelines, rules or laws. Rather it is affirmed as an attitude toward the reality of social division, the brokenness of the human condition. That attitude or ethos provides a new basis for action in the human community: commitment to the vision of the Kingdom of God. For the Christian living an awareness of the new covenant, human suffering and need is a summons to advocate, to testify to God's will for justice among all people.

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<sup>7</sup>Bruce C. Birch, "Hunger, Poverty and Biblical Religion," The Christian Century XCII, 22, 1975, pp. 593-599 calls the Church to a reconsideration of its theological perspective, to move away from a "theology of saving" to a "theology of blessing."

Since the covenant is proclaimed by the living Body of Christ, it is essential that the Church display the gospel it proclaims by incorporating that gospel into its own institutional life. Unity among Christians, among churches, is a prerequisite to effective, responsible action toward the injustices of hunger. The power of the spirit lies within the process of ecumenical cooperation and unity, as affirmed by the Pauline approach to the divisions in the Church at Corinth. More than institutional unity is required of the Church, however; the Church is also mandated to act out of a sense of the unity of the faith with its own actions in society. The realm of faith must not be separated from the realm of daily life, even though the implications of faith set the Christian against the reality encountered in life each day.

The third characteristic of the Christian ethos for a response to hunger is hope. The evangelistic message that is shared by the Church with the world is not a reactionary manifesto. It is a gift which stands out clearly in contrast to the despair which thrives within reality, yet which is meant not as a barrier to death, but as a springboard to fuller, more abundant life. The joy and richness of life lived in accordance with God's will (as revealed in the sacramental ethos) contrasts sharply with the burden imposed by more selfish motives. Yet the vision of the Kingdom of God is not proclaimed to replace selfishness; it is presented as a better way, a new, improved way of living, a better option. The vision of the Kingdom of God does not include the necessity that human beings solve the problem of how to bring that vision about. No one knows the "master plan" for salvation. Yet the sacramental ethos suggests an attitude through which "the way"

can be discovered; it is by discerning the Body of Christ. The Church can discern its commission in the activity of God among the poor in the world. As is celebrated in the Last Supper, Christ chooses to risk everything in order to bring about God's kingdom. The Church may be facing the spectre of institutional death as it confronts the problem of hunger. If it acts in faith it will take the risks required as it struggles with the powerful forces of the world. This in itself is a sign of hope both for the Church and for the hungry. It is in willingness to relinquish its life that the Church will discover the spiritual renewal that it needs. It is by such a commitment that the poor will be empowered to claim the justice promised in the final judgement.

In the act of giving thanks for God's gracious gifts, the act of the Eucharist, the Church proclaims agape, justice and hope to a hungry world. Responding in faith and action to combat the causes of malnutrition, starvation and environmental degradation is consistent with, indeed, is required by, the most universal, ancient and fundamental definition of the nature of Christianity, the Lord's Supper.

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